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# The Persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism In the Southern Baptist Convention

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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE PERSISTENCE OF CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM IN THE SOUTHERN  
BAPTIST CONVENTION

by

Brett Rushing

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
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in Fulfillment  
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## Abstract

The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the world. For over 150 years, the Convention has grown throughout, not only the southern United States, but throughout the world. Within this denomination, though, two opposing belief strands coexist. Those two strands are Calvinism and Arminianism. The researcher investigates why these two strands coexist and have not led to a schism within the denomination. The researcher also looks at if the two strands will cause a split at some point, or if the issue of the two is a non-issue to most.

## Key Terms

Calvinism- The belief that man is predestined to go to either heaven or hell before they are born.

Arminianism- The belief that man has a free choice, or free will, on if they will follow God or not.

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## Reasoning

A selection from the founding document of a contemporary religious faith provides the framework for the proposed research study of the communication surrounding unity in the face of a potentially fierce debate.

“Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation (*Baptist Faith and Message*).”

This excerpt from the *Baptist Faith and Message* has drawn much debate over the 160 years that the Southern Baptist Convention has existed. The issue is that this statement appears contradictory, seeming to support two different belief sets in Christianity that have butted heads for centuries. Those two belief sets are Calvinism and Arminianism.

Calvinism is a belief set in Christianity that points to God choosing certain people that will be saved, predestining them to come to a saving salvation in Christ. People do not have a choice in this matter, as God has decreed it. There are five main tenets that Calvinists uphold. The first is a total depravity among humans, meaning that humans are wicked and there is no way for them to come to salvation without help. That help is Jesus Christ. The second is unconditional election, meaning that God has called those He will save. He has predestined them to be saved. The third, and most controversial, is limited atonement. This simply states that Jesus did not die for all, but only for those that are “the elect.” The fourth is irresistible grace, or the belief that when God calls someone, they have no choice but to go to Him. His calling is so strong on their life that they really do not have a choice. The fifth, and final, tenet that Calvinists uphold to is perseverance of the saints. This states that if someone is saved, God will not let that person fall away. If that person begins to fall into a pattern of sin, God will draw them back and not let them continue to fall (Dabney).

The other strand of Baptist faith is Arminianism. Arminianism is a belief set in Christianity that states that people freely choose God. God does not decide who will come to salvation, but through free will, humans choose for themselves. This means that salvation is open to all and not just a certain chosen few. Arminians also have five tenets that they hold to. These directly relate to the five points of Calvinism, giving the alternate belief for the coinciding point. The first tenet is man’s free will. While the fall of man severely hurt humans, it did not leave them completely spiritually depraved. Man can still come to a saving salvation in Christ through their own free will. They have a choice in the matter. The second is conditional election. This states that God knew who



would come to a salvation in Him before the foundation of the World. With this in mind, he selected only those that He knew would freely respond to the Gospel. The third is general atonement. This states that Jesus did not die for only those who are “the elect,” but for all. Salvation is not only available to those that God knew would accept it. It is open to all people. God just knows who will respond to the call. The fourth tenet is that the Holy Spirit can be resisted. Arminians believe that a person can resist the call of God, due to the free will that they have. If they cannot resist, that is not free will. The fifth, and last, tenet is falling from grace. This simply says that a person can lose their salvation. God does not draw them back, but a person freely chooses to leave God for other things (Stine).

The differences in the belief sets, present since the inception of the Southern Baptist Convention, are clear and sharp, prompting a question as to how they have persisted within the Southern Baptist Convention for so long. Over time, one might reasonably expect one of three developments: 1. “Blending” of the two strands into a noncontroversial new unity; 2. Dominance of one strand, with the eventual disappearance of the other; or 3. Schism. Yet none of these possibilities have materialized. Thus, the history of the Convention provides important context for the proposed research.

The Southern Baptist Convention was formed in 1845 in Augusta, Georgia. The Convention was formed from two groups of Baptists that decided to unite and form one body. These groups were the Philadelphia Association and the Sandy Creek Association. These two associations felt that it was best that they align themselves together to be one unified body of believers and to have one convention instead of two. And while there

were a few beliefs that the groups did not see eye to eye on, there was one that was soared above the rest. That belief was the groups' stance on Calvinism and Arminianism (Baker).

The Philadelphia Association was a group of believers that strongly believed that Calvinism was true doctrine. There was no way around this. These people were so firm in their stance on this issue that some theologians proclaimed them to be "baptizing Presbyterians." And while they were five-point Calvinists, they still sent missionaries out to evangelize the unreached areas, in this case the South. They were solely responsible for the rapid growth of the Regular Baptists of the South.

On the other side of the coin was the Sandy Creek Association. Unlike the Philadelphia Association, they were far from Calvinist. Members of the Sandy Creek Association were Arminian through and through. They firmly believed in the free will of man and his choice to choose God. They felt that they needed to "minimize Calvinism and emphasize evangelism."

So why would these two groups choose to group themselves together with such different belief sets? This is not just a tiny disagreement that they had. This was and still is an issue that divided congregations and denominations.

Most believe that the main reason that these two came together was that they saw this disagreement as, in fact, not a disagreement at all. On the contrary, they felt that they were in agreement with one another on the issue. They saw each other as Christian brothers and sisters and not as Calvinists or Arminians. And when the issue came up,

they decided that it could be one easy answer...both. They recognized that the Bible pointed to both being correct and that one or the other is not clearly defined in the Bible as being correct. With this in mind, the General Baptists of the Philadelphia Association and the Separate Baptists from the Sandy Creek Association came together to form the Southern Baptist Convention.

While this explains the historical reason for the diversity of belief, it does not explain why the situation is still like this today. Over time, one would think that this issue would have sprouted roots deep enough to separate the two groups from each other or evolved in one of the ways suggested above – merger, dominance of one belief set over the other, or schism within the church. It has not, providing the historical and logical basis for the research question: “What explains the persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism in the Southern Baptist Convention?”

### Literature Review

Surprisingly, there has not been much research done into the reason for this issue. Most information one will find is in various articles, but there is a severe lack of books and research papers done on this phenomenon. Many find this is just a simple answer. Some will say that the persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism in the Southern Baptist Convention is due to the fact that it is a secondary issue and not a primary issue, such as bringing the Gospel to a lost world. But the problem with this is that the issue has still divided denominations in the past. If it is such a small secondary issue, then why did other denominations not feel the same way about it? Others will say that the persistence is a direct result of the history of Southern Baptist churches and that most just do not feel

that there is a great need to change something that has been such a big part of their history. While this has some merit, it still lacks the strong reasoning showing how to keep groups of opposite beliefs together.

There are two prominent books that focus on each of the two sides and how they deal with the Southern Baptist Convention. The first is a book titled “*Whosoever Will.*” This book was written after the “John 3:16 Conference” which was held in Woodstock, Georgia in 2008. This conference was hosted by First Baptist Church Woodstock and put on by New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Luther Rice Seminary, and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The book is a commentary on all that was said at the conference and outlines the five points of Calvinism and the issues that Southern Baptists have with many of them.

Some of the issues addressed in the book are about the five points of Calvinism represented by the acronym TULIP. TULIP represents Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. Many of the issues addressed involved the problems with limited atonement and unconditional election. These Southern Baptists feel that the Bible states clearly that man has a choice in the matter and is not bound to a decision based on God’s decision for them. Humans are not robots. They are free-thinking, free-willed beings. While the book addresses problems, it also addresses some things they can agree with. The main point of agreement is the perseverance of the saints. This goes to the belief of if saved, always saved. Southern Baptists are clear that once a person is saved, they cannot lose their salvation.

On the other side of the table is a book that was also written due to a conference. This book, “*Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*,” was written after the “Building Bridges Conference” that was intended to help Southern Baptist understand Calvinism and the beliefs it entailed. This conference was hosted at Ridgecrest Conference Center by Lifeway Christian Resources and was put on by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Founders Ministries in 2007. This conference wanted to fix the faults that many believed Calvinists believed. The book is a commentary about what was said at the conference.

One of the main points that was made during this conference was that Calvinism is not what many people believe it to be. It is actually a bit more complex. Many people see Calvinism as TULIP, when actually there are varying degrees of Calvinism. Some may be five-point Calvinists, but others could be four-point Calvinists. Also, a big issue that was raised was how this affects evangelism. They wanted to make sure people knew that Calvinism does not kill evangelism, but in fact supports it.

The researcher also explored the history of the Southern Baptist Convention in a hope to reveal some answers to the persistency of these two different ideologies living together. To do this, the researcher will go through a book by Stanton Norman, a professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, called “*The Baptist Way*.” In this book, Norman goes through the history of the Southern Baptist Convention and where their beliefs are founded in the Bible. In this work, Norman tells of Southern Baptist origins and how they have developed over time. In regards to the topic at hand, he speaks of how Southern Baptists were first Calvinistic, but then moved toward

Arminianism during the World War II era. During the 1980s and 1990s, Calvinism came back into focus as pastors started attempting to preach all of the Bible and not just parts.

“*Democratic Religion*” is another book that helped the researcher gain information about the Southern Baptist Convention, its doctrines and beliefs, and why Calvinism and Arminianism have persisted. “*Democratic Religion*” is by Gregory A. Wills, a professor at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. This book explores the history of the Southern Baptist Convention, but goes into the Calvinism and Arminianism part of history also. Wills looks at Calvinism and Arminianism as two different ideologies that have grown together within the Convention, but have not caused much controversy. Because of this, he believes they have not had a reason to have a schism.

Another book by Gregory A. Wills that helped is “*Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*.” This book is a complete history of the seminary from 1859 to 2009. Southern Seminary was the first seminary to be established, so they are the flagship and many of the newer seminaries are based on their model. This book also goes into the history of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention and why it has persisted and not caused a division within the denomination. Wills speaks of how Calvinism was present early at Southern Seminary, but as the 40s hit, many scholars went to the Northeast and overseas to receive an education. When they returned, they were liberalized and as they taught people at Southern Seminary, they taught Arminianism. In the 1990s, Al Mohler became the President of Southern and with him came his Calvinistic beliefs. This caused a shift that had slowly been occurring to spread throughout the Convention.

On the Communication Studies side of literature, the researcher explored a variety of articles that delve into religious schisms and unity through religious differences. In “Ethical Disagreement as an Obstacle to Ecclesial Communion,” Bruce Williams writes about ethical issues that are barriers to unity within the Church. These issues, whether they be homosexuality or war, cause schisms within the church. Relating this to the study being done, these ethical issues have led to schisms, yet Calvinism and Arminianism, which have led to schisms in some denominations just as the ethical issues have, has not led to a split in the Southern Baptist Convention. Sometimes even minute issues, such as if a preacher can be married or not or even issues such as the side of the church that the piano should be on, can split congregations and denominations. These issues seem ridiculous compared to the argument over Calvinism and Arminianism, so the researcher will use this piece to investigate how the Southern Baptist Convention still stands firm.

In “Religious Diversity in a Conservative Baptist Congregation,” Kevin Dougherty, Christopher Bader, Paul Froese, Edward Poison, and Buster Smith investigate the diversity within the conservative Southern Baptist Convention. To do this, they surveyed a small Baptist church of two hundred in Texas. This survey contained questions about beliefs and what the individual believed was true about God. Through this survey they were able to see how within even a small, two hundred member church, people have different opinions about who God is and what to believe about him. Even with this widespread diversity within this church, they still are unified for a common goal. They do not find these differences as a negative, but as a positive.

Another piece to look at is “Managing Dialectics to Make a Difference: Tension Management in a Community Building Organization.” This article by Gerald Driskill, John Meyer, Julien Mirivel, and Kim Powell looks at how different congregations and denominations came together for a common goal as members of different churches and belief sets to work with the Nehemiah Group, a local social help organization. The Nehemiah Group “unites local churches to serve the community.” Even though many of these churches do not believe the same things, they come together to work toward this common goal of uniting the community and helping those in need.

In John Gribas’ “Doing Teams While Being the Body: Managing Spiritual /Secular Dialectical Tensions of Defining the Church Collective through Transcendent Metaphor,” the author explores how the Western Evangelical churches have begun to classify themselves as teams and set on one mission, whether you are part of a certain denomination or not. The word “team” is extremely important here because it means that a group of different people are coming together to achieve a common goal. That goal is the salvation of lives across the world. It does not matter if one is Southern Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, or Lutheran, they are all working together despite their differences. Gribas also explores the use of “body” within the church, as it is one of the most widely used metaphors in Christian literature. The word “body” gives the metaphor that while someone may do one part well, another may do a different part well. They cannot do everything by themselves, but working together, they can achieve their goal and be a healthy, growing body.

Matthew T. Althouse wrote in “Reading the Baptist Schism of 2000: Kierkegaardian Hermeneutics and Religious Freedom,” about the split that occurred



within the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000. This split, due to the changing of the Baptist Faith and Message in 2000, took away almost 17 percent of the Southern Baptist Convention's funding, as the Baptist General Convention of Texas mostly withdrew from the Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention changed the Baptist Faith and Message to a more conservative approach and this led the more liberal-minded congregations to withdraw. The communication involved between the two parties was not what it should have been and this also shows that a schism within the Southern Baptist Convention has happened over less controversial theological issues than Calvinism and Arminianism.

In "The Southern Baptist Controversy: A Social Drama," William S. Stone Jr. explores the "reformation movement" that occurred from 1979 to 1990 and split the denomination into three camps involving conservatives, moderates, and fundamentalists. He goes on to say how the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States and they have gone through many tough times but still remain strong.

With all of these sources, the researcher feels prepared to answer the proposed research question: "What has led to the persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism in the Southern Baptist Convention?"

### Methodology

As the researcher investigated how this persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism mingling together in the Southern Baptist Convention lasted for over a hundred and fifty years, he will first explain how he will go about his research. The

researcher's main goal was to find out from pastors themselves where their respective churches stand on the issue and why they believe the division has remained constant even in unity through the years. He also talked with instructors at a couple of seminaries across the country and see what they primarily teach and if they can explain this phenomenon. He then attempted to get in contact with an official representative of the Southern Baptist Convention and find out what they believe has led to this persistence that is so uncommon. In the end, the researcher wanted to find out if the persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism coexisting in the Southern Baptist Convention is dependent on a common belief set that falls somewhere in between both or if there is something else that is causing this phenomenon.

The researcher's first objective was to talk with pastors in the Southeast that preach at Southern Baptist churches and find out where their church stands on the issue. To do this, he developed a list of questions that he can ask each pastor, whether through e-mail or phone conversation or live interview, and record their answers. Through this method, the researcher can easily gain answers to many questions such as the primary belief in the majority of the churches he asks and how pastors' answers vary on why this difference in mindset has continued throughout the years. The researcher planned to interview between ten and twenty pastors about their church's position on the issue and create a log that has all of their answers in one place. These pastors were chosen at random across the Southeast.

The two questions on the survey directly related to where a church stands on the issue of Calvinism and Arminianism and why they feel both have persisted in the church. The researcher first asked a question to find out where the pastor's church stands on the

issue. This question was “Where does your church stand on the issue of Calvinism?” He then had a scale of one to ten, with one being Arminian and ten being Calvinist. The pastor could then just check a number and the question would be complete. The researcher asked this question to see if there is a majority of pastors that believe their church to be in the middle on the issue, which could be a cause for the persistence in itself.

After the previous question, the researcher wanted to also ask about the persistency of Calvinism and Arminianism. The question asked was “What has caused the persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism in the Southern Baptist Convention though the two belief sets are on opposite ends of the spectrum?” Through this question, he hoped to gain personal insights on why these pastors feel it has persisted. The researcher wanted to see if the pastors interviewed are in agreement or not over the reasons and how many different reasons they feel there are.

When contacting the seminaries, the researcher e-mailed the respective presidents to get information from them. Not surprisingly, many of the presidents did not e-mail back, but many forwarded the e-mail to someone at the school who can answer the question best. Most seminaries, as places of education, love to see enthusiasm to learn and do not want to quench that desire. Five seminaries were contacted about their stance on this issue. These seminaries include New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. A similar questionnaire was also created for the seminaries.

The questionnaire consisted of questions that gauge where the seminaries stand on the issue of Calvinism and Arminianism. After these questions, the researcher wanted to find out what they believe has led to the persistence in the Southern Baptist Convention and if they think there will be a change any time soon. He also wanted to find out if they feel that the Southern Baptist Convention should change its policy of leaving it open for discussion.

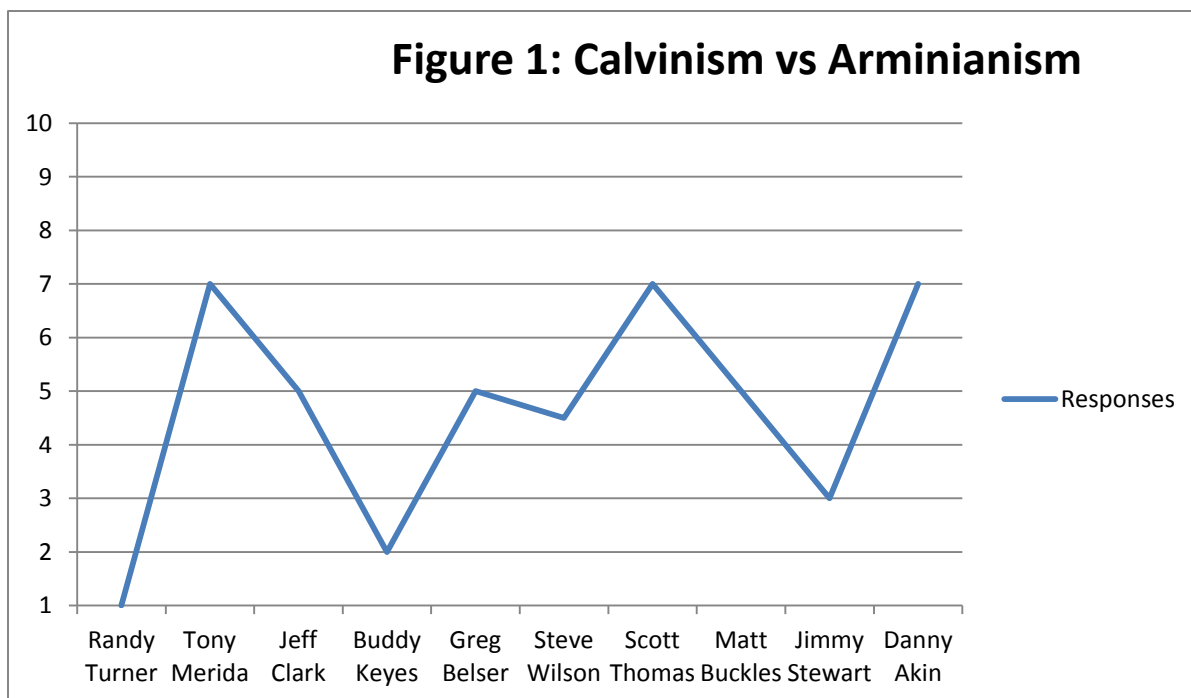
Finally, the researcher attempted to contact the Southern Baptist Convention main offices and find out from the people in charge why they feel this persistence has occurred. Unfortunately, the researcher received no response from the Southern Baptist Convention regarding this issue.

Once the information was gathered, the researcher compiled the pastor responses and see where each falls. He then put them into a chart to see if they all fall into a certain area or if it is widespread where the churches stand on the issue of Calvinism and Arminianism. The researcher then used the data collected from the discussion questions to find answers from those who are in the middle of this phenomenon every day.

A portrait of pastor opinions, seminary opinions, and the Southern Baptist Convention position on the issue will be elaborated upon next and analyzed for implications of how the Southern Baptists have maintained unity in the face of such a potentially divisive issue for so many years.

## Results

Southern Baptist churches around the South are very diverse in their beliefs relating to what would be labeled as “tertiary” or “unimportant” issues. Some of these issues include music or no music, women or no women in leadership positions, ideal church size, and other things that do not collide with doctrinal truth. These are things that people can disagree on and there be no question of whether the two different sides are Christian or non-Christian. Within the Southern Baptist Convention, there emerged also a widespread array of views regarding Calvinism and Arminianism. Throughout this study, the researcher interviewed twelve different pastors of churches to find where their church stood on the issue. The researcher wanted to know what they taught to their congregation, if it was an issue, and why they believed persistence in the two opposing views continued. The below survey was taken with a one to ten scale, with one being Arminian and ten being Calvinistic to answer the first of the study’s key research questions: what are the expressed beliefs of Southern Baptist pastors on the Calvinism/Arminianism issue?



The information gathered shows that responses were all near the middle with 10 being Calvinism and 1 being Arminianism. With pastors stating that their church fell into a highly Arminian or a primarily Calvinistic viewpoint, most were near the middle, even if they were not exactly in the middle. Randy Turner and Buddy Keyes were the most Arminian of all the pastors surveyed, with their responses being a one and a two. All others surveyed were within two of the middle, which is an extremely important finding. If the majority of churches find themselves at or near the middle of the spectrum, this leads one to believe that most do not know what the answer is. With a five representing being in the middle and not favoring either side, the majority fell closer to this than either of the extremes. Sure, some pastors believe certain ways, but hardly any pastors would claim to be fully one way or the other. In fact, for one to be fully one or the other would not allow them to be in the Southern Baptist Convention.

The researcher would like to point out that the reader must return to the Baptist Faith and Message that was referenced at the beginning of this text and see that it leaves room for both, but not specifically one. It states that Southern Baptists believe that if a person is saved, they will always be saved. This is a point from Calvinism that most will recognize as the P in TULIP. This is the Perseverance of the Saints. To be a Southern Baptist church, the church must agree with this statement. That alone makes it where people cannot be fully Arminian and be a part of the Southern Baptist Convention. Arminianism states that one can lose their salvation. This directly contradicts what the Southern Baptist Convention has stated they, and their subsequent body of churches, believe.

On the other side, the Baptist Faith and Message also states that it is the free choice of man to decide to follow God or not. Salvation is a gift from God that man chooses to accept or deny. Calvinism states that we cannot choose whether to accept or deny it. If given the opportunity, we must accept it. This is Irresistible Grace, or the I in TULIP. The Baptist Faith and Message contradicts this point by stating that it is a choice of the believer to chase after God or to chase after the things of the World.

During the interviews, the researcher received numerical responses from ten of the twelve pastors that communicated their information back to the researcher. Two believed that the scale was broken and had a false premise. This is also important to take note of because it raises an interesting point. Calvinism and Arminianism are tough to measure on a scale. Even if one believes so many things one way, they could identify themselves another. This is an area that the researcher believes could be delved into further in the future. The responses received indicated that one pastor believed their church to be a 1, one believed their church to be a 2, one believed they were a 3, one believed they were a 4.5, three believe they were a 5, and three believed they were a 7. As stated, there were two pastors who believed a scale was flawed and could not be measured. There are many different views and beliefs throughout the Southern Baptist Convention that this is not surprising. The researcher placed them in a N/A category.

The second part of the survey looked into the pastor's personal beliefs on why the persistence continued to this day, to answer the second key research question: why do Southern Baptists believe this basic contradiction of beliefs has been persistently

accepted within the church? This left an open-ended area that pastors could air their beliefs and gain more information than just an arbitrary number. Each pastor's views are summarized in Table 1:

Randy Turner	The doctrines remain because the proponents of the respective positions believe them to be truth, rooted in scripture. I honestly do not know why the debate continues. I personally have never been part of the dialogue and do not wish to be. One of the best things about being Southern Baptist to me is the autonomy of the local church. In addition, the doctrine of the Priesthood of the believer allows for each individual to interpret scripture for his or her self.
Tony Merida	Not sure. Fallen humanity trying to interpret the Bible?
Jeff Clark	There is a balance between the two beliefs. Think of it as the Yin and Yang, Black and White, idea. They are both right. God elects and we choose. I have no idea where the seminaries are on this issue.
Larry Leblanc	The Southern Baptist Convention is comprised of an autonomous group of churches. Each church chooses its own leaders and these leaders have different theological leanings on Calvinism, Arminianism, and a variety of other doctrinal issues. There has been a changing tide of general consensus on process of election and predestination over generations in the convention. The issue is over trying to reconcile the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. The Baptist Faith and Message (2000) allows for varying interpretations and there will be continued debate over these until Christ returns. There are God honoring scholars on both sides of the issue there is room to agree to disagree. The debate when held with humility can be healthy because going too far in either direction will lead to heresy.
Buddy Keyes	There always have been some pastors that have leaned toward the Calvinistic theology. Some of these teach in the Seminaries and that is where most of the Calvinistic believe in the Southern Baptist Convention comes from.
Greg Belser	I would suggest that there are few, if any, true Arminians among Southern Baptists. I have never met a single one in almost 35 years of ministry. Most Southern Baptists hold to perseverance and most would agree to some form of radical depravity. As for why a hybrid soteriology is embraced by most Southern Baptists, it is my conviction that the Convention has reaped what the seminaries have been sowing. Since the 1920's the predominant soteriology espoused in our seminaries is of a hybrid variety. Thus educated pastors fill pulpits, write books, etc. that influence an entire



	<p>generation(s) of people. Even the so-called uneducated pastor would have access to such theology through the state conventions and their related conferencing. (This is true of several strains of theological thought.) So, if I might be so bold, Brett, your question suggests a divide as wide as 5 points. I would argue that your premise is faulty. There are really only 2-3 points of Calvinism that are hotly debated among Southern Baptists, suggesting that we are closer than you might otherwise think. The divide persists, whether across 5 points or only 2-3 points, because people love a good conversation, even argument, and the pride of man is greatly offended by Calvinism. As for me and my house, we keep our eyes on the Gospel and preach it unapologetically to folks of every soteriological stripe.</p>
Steve Wilson	<p>This is only an issue where men choose to make it an issue. There was the issue of inerrancy before this and there was another issue before that. I think it pleases Satan for there to be division among God's people. Division hinders our work and weakens our witness. I believe that if a definitive stand is made on this issue then another issue will arise.</p> <p>My point is that a church can be healthy, growing, and cooperate with other believers without this being an issue in any way.</p>
Scott Thomas	<p>The persistence indicates a tension that must be managed and not a problem that will ever be solved. If we got rid of either side of the debate we would not solve a problem, we might have a bigger problem. For example, a basic division between the two is the freewill of man vs the sovereignty of God. How can that be solved? Both groups have biblically based answers. There has to be common ground. I call the common ground the Bible. I think the Bible teaches both. But the question of the thesis is not the solution but the "persistence." The persistence is fueled by the honest questions of well-meaning pastors, educators, and members. I believe discussion, deeper study, and hard questions are important to growth. Abraham ask, "How can this be . . .at my age." Paul desperately sought answers to the war that was within his flesh. Jesus asked, "who do men say that I am." He not only unveiled Peter's correct response but he unveiled the fact of an honest debate among the people. He didn't reprimand them for the debate or the incorrect answers. Therefore, the persistence rises from the honest questions and study from scripture. It comes from the well-meaning wrestling with the word of God. It comes from students asking "who, what, when, where, why?"</p>
Woody Rimes	<p>I think there are those who desire to go back to the teachings of the reformers, while some are moving away from those teachings. Calvinism and Arminianism are the two basic, better understood, positions that pastors adhere to doctrinally adhere. The battle of</p>

	man's free will and God's grace are two facets that are constant reminders of this dilemma.
Matt Buckles	Two factors in my opinion: (1) The prominence of John MacArthur in evangel Christianity in America. He is a strong Calvinist. Throw in a John Piper and other great preachers, writers, etc. (2) The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary led by President Al Mohler in Louisville, KY and other key SBC leaders; in both agencies and churches. I predict a rise in Calvinism in the SBC over the next 10-20 years.
Jimmy Stewart	<p>It is impossible for me to group with competency any members in the Arminianism category. Nor would it be prudent for me to speculate as to the number of members who are Calvinists. The majority of members would prefer to be considered biblical Christians and not have theological labels.</p> <p>However, for the sake of your request, I would say that there are probably any number of members who would side squarely on the side of free will and at the same time others who would hold to the absolute sovereignty of God. Characterizing members as to their theological positions is almost as difficult as classifying their worship style preferences.</p> <p>I know you need a number and I would greatly appreciate receiving a copy of your paper. So, I would say that the congregation is around a 70/30 split with 80% being slightly Arminian and 20% being mostly Calvinist.</p> <p>Which leads us to the true conundrum of 21st century Southern Baptist life, how do we maintain unity with such theological diversity? Actually, we have done this for years! The difference today is that many Calvinists are insisting that their position is 100% right and any other position is 100% wrong. This is itself wrong, so how can Calvinists be right?</p> <p>The true cause of the continuing existence of both theological positions in the SBC is that both are evident in scripture. If God had wanted us to only hold one of these positions He would have eliminated the other from inclusion. Both are present so both are right. Our God is able to work both at the same time. Ultimately, He is absolutely sovereign and no man can do anything apart for the permission of God but He allows man to participate in the process so that man can learn and love Him back.</p>
Danny Akin	Recent skirmish over this issue in the Southern Baptist Convention. Not an issue until the adoption of BFM 2000, which was appointed by Paige Patterson, Adrian Rodgers, and Al Mohler. Today in some people's minds, there seems to be a new battle within the

	<p>Baptist world over the issue of Calvinism. I think there's a lot more heat than there is light. A lot more rhetoric than there is substance. Do I think the convention will split of Calvinism? No. Will Calvinism rise as an issue of inerrancy? No. It's not an issue that inerrancy was. A lot of this is generational. Do I find the 20 somethings, 30 somethings, and 40 somethings getting hot and bothered over this issue? No. The people that care about this are the older generations. Most people in the church do not understand this issue. Calvinism is a good boogey-man today. So much of this is attitudinal and disposition. If you believe the Bible is God's word, you find that most of us are much closer than some think.</p>
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As one can see, there are a wide variety of different beliefs within the group of pastors interviewed, but all stand by one thing, and it goes to the premise stated earlier. It is not a primary issue, and that is why they can coexist together. Data points to many different factors besides a “who knows” attitude as well. Many point to congregations being ignorant of the debate. Most pastors believed that the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism was a non-issue. They believed that some people like to argue it, but the majority of pastors did not care one way or the other. At the end of the day, they both must preach the Gospel. Many pastors believe that one of the main reasons Calvinism has come on strongly in the past 20 years is because of popular pastors that are Calvinist. Some of the strongest preachers throughout the Convention are Calvinist so when people listen to podcasts by them or read books by them, they are gaining a Calvinist perspective. Another theme I saw was the dismissal of the terms. Some pastors believed that their congregations would not care for either title, but to just be a Christian. This is a fair accusation because Calvinism and Arminianism have gained negative connotations because of their followers who are on the extreme sides of the issues. Most would rather just not care one way or the other and follow Christ. Some point to teachings in

Seminaries leading to different beliefs. The researcher wanted to contact five different Southern Baptist seminaries for the research, but only received three responses.

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary	<p>Danny Akin, President of Southeastern, spoke for his church and Southeastern with his response. Recent skirmish over this issue in the Southern Baptist Convention. Not an issue until the adoption of BFM 2000, which was appointed by Paige Patterson, Adrian Rodgers, and Al Mohler. Today in some people's minds, there seems to be a new battle within the Baptist world over the issue of Calvinism. I think there's a lot more heat than there is light. A lot more rhetoric than there is substance. Do I think the convention will split of Calvinism? No. Will Calvinism rise as an issue of inerrancy? No. It's not an issue that inerrancy was. A lot of this is generational. Do I find the 20 somethings, 30 somethings, and 40 somethings getting hot and bothered over this issue? No. The people that care about this are the older generations. Most people in the church do not understand this issue. Calvinism is a good boogey-man today. So much of this is attitudinal and disposition. If you believe the Bible is God's word, you find that most of us are much closer than some think.</p>
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary	<p>We are neither Calvinists nor Arminians. We are Baptists, differing with both extensively. Our roots are with the Anabaptists of Europe, and the Baptists of England. There are very diverse views represented in our faculty and student body. Like Calvinists, we believe in the permanency of salvation. Like the Arminians, we believe that all can come to Christ, that man has a will that is free. We advocate an aggressive program of missions and evangelism. We reject</p>

	<p>absolutely infant baptism, elder rule in church government, and any kind of liaison or union with the state. In these later areas we agree with neither Calvinists nor Arminians.</p> <p>Baptists are a free people. Historically, the Charleston tradition (Calvinistic) and the Sandy Creek tradition, (more Arminian) flowed as two tributaries into the Southern Baptist River, each bring assets and flowing in relative peace together. More recently this union has been tested by a strong, aggressive new form of popular Calvinism. The final results cannot yet be predicted.</p>
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary	<p>Surveys conducted in recent years by LifeWay Christian Resources, our SBC publisher; do indicate that the majority of Southern Baptists do not identify themselves as reformed. However, very few would identify themselves as Arminian. The Baptist Faith and Message, our SBC doctrinal statement, is not viewed as a reformed doctrinal statement, but neither is it viewed as Arminian. If you offered Southern Baptists, particularly those who think theologically, the choices of reformed, Arminian, or none of the above as a description of their theology, most would choose none of the above. Some would choose reformed, but very few would choose Arminian. If not reformed or Arminian, what then are those who are not reformed? Baptist. I would be very surprised if any SBC President would view himself or his institution or the doctrinal statement of his institution as Arminian, but clearly not all of them would say they were reformed.</p>

The data presented above were taken from email surveys and phone interviews.

According to these responses, there is little reason to believe that congregations believe

one way or another with strong conviction. Most would not identify themselves with either side and it leads to most members not caring one way or another.

The researcher did not receive a response back from an official of the Southern Baptist Convention.

### Discussion

As the findings show, there is no sign of a stop to the persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism in the Southern Baptist Convention. Southern Baptist churches throughout the Southeast fall on both ends of the spectrum. Some churches believe in Calvinism while others believe in Arminianism. Both have their beliefs and neither is necessarily wrong.

As seen in “*Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*” and “*Whosoever Will*,” both sides have their points that are supported by the Bible. There are verses that support Calvinism and verses that support Arminianism. This is the main reason that there are two different belief systems at odds. The two belief sets are opposites of each other, but there is support for each of them within the same religious text. No one strand of belief can definitively state that they are correct and the other is incorrect.

Gregory Wills’ two books, “*Democratic Religion*” and “*Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*” both gave historical reasoning that these two strands have persisted. The reasoning that was stated is that there is support for both and though historically both have had their ups and downs of popularity within the Convention, now people are making their own decision on a church by church basis. This is directly reflected in the comments made by Randy Turner, who stated that “One of the best things

about being Southern Baptist to me is the autonomy of the local church.” The local church can choose its belief system on the tertiary issues. As long as it stands united with the Southern Baptist Convention on the primary issues, no one will complain to them.

In Bruce Williams article “Ethical Disagreement as an Obstacle to Ecclesial Communion,” the author showed how ethical areas made people not want to work together. Issues of homosexuality, war, or alcohol allowance have led to schisms within churches throughout the country. Calvinism and Arminianism still has not led to a split. Williams clarifies that these are ethical issues that lead to splits. Most do not believe the Calvinism or Arminianism debate is an ethical issue. It is about if people have a choice or if people do not have a choice. That’s not ethical. This is something that the researcher gathered from the results that were received from participants in the survey. Both sides asked stated, in one way or another, that whether people have a choice or they do not have a choice, whether there is free will or predestination, people do not know if one will be saved. If people have a choice, preach the Gospel and one may choose to follow Christ. If people are predestined to choose God or not to choose Him, preach the Gospel because people do not know who is predestined.

In “Managing Dialectics to Make a Difference: Tension Management in a Community Building Organization,” Driskill and his fellow authors revealed how different groups, even different denominations, can come together to achieve a common goal. In their case, people of different denominations came together to serve their community with The Nehemiah Group. These people came together, putting aside differences, to serve God by serving their community. In the same way, though there are many churches with differing opinions on Calvinism and Arminianism in the Southern

Baptist Convention, they still come together as one body, putting aside the differences, to be known as Southern Baptists. As Paige Patterson, President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas stated, “We are neither Calvinists nor Arminians. We are Baptists...” The same is seen in John Gribas’ “Doing Teams While Being the Body: Managing Spiritual/Secular Dialectical Tensions of Defining the Church Collective through Transcendent Metaphor.” The Southern Baptist Convention strives to be the body of Christ first and foremost. Tertiary issues should not get in the way of that.

Research revealed that most churches do not know which is right or which is wrong. Most pastors interviewed stated that they were near the middle of the spectrum, which means that they believe there is some things right in both, but some things wrong with both. As stated, they do not know. And when a pastor is not sure of something, they normally do not make it a focal point of their messages on Sunday. The debate is truly confined to small groups within the convention that is made up mostly of pastors who want to argue. During the researcher’s discussion with Danny Akin, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, he noted that one of the main reasons that the two sides can coexist together within the same convention is because congregations have no idea about either side or they do not care. If a researcher were to ask a congregation if they were Calvinist or Arminian, most would not know what the researcher was asking for. It is not a big enough issue to worry about. Either way, Christians should share the Gospel with others in hopes that they will be saved by God.

Calvinism and Arminianism will continue to coexist in the Southern Baptist Convention until the end. These two supposedly competing strands do not compete within the Convention. Most churches do not have a stance on the issue or they do not



care either way. Most in congregations do not know what either of them are, which leads to them not leaning to one side or the other. And the majority of Southern Baptist churches feel that the debate is a tertiary issue that should not be a reason to break communion with each other. For all of these reasons, Calvinism and Arminianism will continue to grow and be ever present in the Southern Baptist Convention.

## Appendix A

### Pastor Survey

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being Arminian and 10 being Calvinist, where does your church fall on the issue?
2. What has caused the persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism in the Southern Baptist Convention though the two belief sets are on opposite ends of the spectrum?"

## Appendix B

### Seminary Survey

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being Arminian and 10 being Calvinist, where does your seminary fall on the issue?
2. What has caused the persistence of Calvinism and Arminianism in the Southern Baptist Convention though the two belief sets are on opposite ends of the spectrum?"

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